

I am Jamilah Tigner, a graduate student at UConn School of Social Work and Intern for ctEQUALITY. I've come to voice my full support of House Bill #6599, An Act Concerning Discrimination.

As a current resident of Connecticut, it has been brought to my attention that our state lacks explicit legal protection against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression. This leaves some members of our population, especially transgender individuals, vulnerable to discrimination in some of the most important areas of their lives, such as housing and employment. Although I do not identify as transgender, I do understand the importance of basic needs like finding housing, a job and adequate healthcare. Our overall livelihood depends on these things. But for transgender people, their livelihood is constantly at risk due to the potential discrimination that looms around every corner, because they know the law is not necessarily on their side as it would be for others. I expect fairness and equal treatment when I look for a job or a home or a doctor, and if this expectation is reasonable for me it should be reasonable for everyone, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

As a new resident of Connecticut, I have been pleasantly surprised that this state is, in many ways, more progressive and supportive of equality and justice than my home state of Texas. It doesn't seem like such a stretch that Connecticut would agree to extend full protection to all of its residents. Passing this bill makes sense to me, not only personally, but also as a future social worker. My social work code of ethics states that I have an obligation to participate in the prevention and elimination of discrimination based on gender identity or expression. I am here today to fulfill that obligation. Discrimination for any reason is enough to cause a person significant harm, and as a social worker I will do my best to assist anyone who has encountered such unfair treatment. But I can only do so much. We need laws that offer explicit protection, so that not only can there be a legal remedy for those who do experience discrimination, but also to prevent discrimination from happening in the first place – by giving notice to potential employers, landlords, and business owners that Connecticut values all residents and is committed to equality.

Seven years ago Connecticut affirmed the need for legal protection on the basis of gender identity and gender expression when legislators voted to add this protection to our state's hate crimes law. So let's finish the job and take the next step by also providing equal protection in our non-discrimination law—by passing H.B. 6599. As a concerned resident, you have my full support in this matter. Seeking equal treatment isn't asking for much, but for transgender people it could mean a world of difference. Thank you for your time and for this opportunity to speak to you.